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ABSTRACT

This guide is intended for use by older persons and their families who contemplate hiring someone to assist periodically with household routines and personal care. The guide offers suggestions and lists the various steps needed to hire a worker. Organized in 12 short narrative sections, the guide covers the following topics: determining what help is needed, setting up a job description/contract, sample contract, contract form, advertising, interviewing, interview checklist, questions to ask references, hiring, financial and legal considerations, keeping your worker, and a flowchart describing the hiring process. (KC)

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HOW TO HIRE HELPERS

A GUIDE FOR ELDERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

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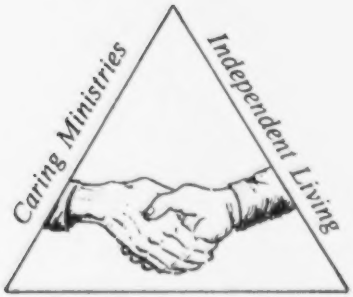

The Task Force on Aging of the Church Council of Greater Seattle was formed in 1981 to address emerging needs of elder persons. Its goal is to promote independent living for older people by developing ministries and services which improve the quality of life for seniors in our community. The Task Force is made up of volunteer representatives from churches, the aging community, and senior-serving organizations.

The Task Force on Aging provides administrative staff for Volunteer Chore Ministry and sponsors programs for caregivers of the elderly. The Task Force has a speakers' bureau and has developed educational conferences on empowerment, pastoral care, and other concerns of aging ministries. Financial support is received from individuals, churches, denominations, and local businesses. Tax deductible donations payable to the CCGS Task Force on Aging are welcomed to allow these caring ministries to continue.

Additional copies of this Guide may be ordered from the Church Council Task Force on Aging, 4759 15th Ave. N.E., Seattle, WA 98105, (206) 525-1213. Discount prices are available for purchase of ten or more Guides. Pre-payment is requested except where a purchase order is submitted.

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Introduction

This Guide has been prepared by the **Task Force on Aging** of the Church Council of Greater Seattle, in response to concerns raised by the community about older persons being victims of fraudulent, abusive, or poorly-qualified workers. It is intended for use by older persons and their families who contemplate hiring someone to assist periodically with household routines and personal care. It is not aimed at persons looking for live-in or attendant care; there are more detailed guides for that purpose already available from such groups as the Resource Center for the Handicapped or the Washington Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities. Some of their excellent material has been useful in preparing this Guide, and we thank them for that.

The decision to hire a helper is not a beginning point; it is a part of a process of deciding what is needed and then exploring what options are available to meet the need. Each older person or family should define first what help is needed and how often it is needed. Many services are available in the community for seniors; once the help needed is defined, it should be determined whether community resources can be used. By calling Senior Information and Assistance in King County (**448-3110** or **1-800-972-9990**), older persons and their families can learn about services providing in-home help. Home health agencies listed in the yellow pages of the phone directories can also be called, but it would be wise to obtain recommendations from reliable sources. Purchasing services directly from organizations saves paperwork, supervision, and time, and may provide reliable and trustworthy help. However, the cost is often lower when you hire your own help. The cost, convenience, and risk factors must be balanced for your best interest.

After considering what community resources are available, you may decide that your needs will be met best by hiring your own worker. The guide offers suggestions and lists the various steps needed to achieve that goal.

Determining What Help is Needed

At some point it has become clear that some routines of daily living are no longer being accomplished, or at least are done only with great difficulty. To determine what help is needed, you may want to list necessary routines and ask yourself what you can do alone, what your family is able and willing to do, and what is not being done. From this you can develop a job description for your worker.

Setting up a Job Description/Contract

The purpose of a job description or contract is to clarify the duties and responsibilities of both parties. Having a formalized agreement is essential if there is a dispute about salary, hours of work, tasks, etc. A contract/job description can always be revised or updated as needed. The more specific you can be in a contract, the less chance there is for confusion or disagreement. If the job involves technical skills such as lifting into the bath tub or giving medications, the worker should be trained and experienced in those skills.

Included here is a sample contract and a blank contract form. You will need to individualize your own contract to meet your and your worker's needs, so you may wish to add other items or leave out some that are listed.

Sample Contract

Employment Contract Between:

Employer *Kris Kross* and Employee *Lee Jones*

Salary: $ *5.00* per hour Fringe Benefits *Bus fare, lunch provided*

Terms of Payment: When *Every Friday* How *Check*

Hours of Work: From *10 a.m.* to *3 p.m.* on *Mon., Wed., Fridays*

CHANGES IN SCHEDULED HOURS ARE NEGOTIABLE

Employee's Social Security Number: *111-11-1111*

DUTIES TO BE PERFORMED

A. Household Tasks:
- Dust and vacuum once a week
- Mop kitchen floor once a week
- Change sheets once a week
- Wash laundry once a week
- Do food shopping once a week
- Cook lunch on days present
- Wash dishes after each meal

B. Personal Care Tasks:
- Assist with bath and shampoo once a week
- Assist with physical exercises
- Transport monthly to doctor's appointment
- Provide some socializing, conversation

NON-ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR

Smoking while at work – Using foul language
Evidence of intoxication – Coming to work late

TERMINATION

Each party will give two weeks' notice before terminating this contract.

Reasons for termination without notice: Theft, failure to carry out duties, evidence of non-acceptable behavior, endangering employer's health or safety.

For work which is unsatisfactory, the employee will be given two warnings. If work continues to be unsatisfactory, a termination date will be set.

Signed:

_____	_____
Employer	*Employee*
Date _____	Date _____
Address _____	Address _____
_____	_____
_____	_____
Phone _____	Phone _____

Contract Form

Employment Contract Between:

Employer _____ and Employee _____

Salary: $ _____ per (hour, week, month) Fringe Benefits: _____

Terms of Payment: When _____ (weekly, monthly) How _____ (Check or cash)

Hours of Work: From _____ to _____ on _____ (days) **changes in scheduled hours are negotiable**

Employee's Social Security Number: _____

DUTIES TO BE PERFORMED (Be specific)

A. Household Tasks:

B. Personal Care Tasks:

NON-ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR

TERMINATION

Signed:

_____ *(Employer)*

Date _____

Address _____

_____

_____

Phone _____

_____ *(Employee)*

Date _____

Address _____

_____

_____

Phone _____

Advertising

How do you go about securing a worker?

Probably the best way is a recommendation from a family member, friend, or someone you trust. Let them know you are looking. Your church or synagogue, or an organization you belong to, the Seattle Mayor's Office for Senior Citizens, or community agencies may be important resources. You may want to check the *"Situation Wanted"* section of the classified ads of your newspapers.

If none of these methods proves fruitful then you can try advertising in the *"Help Wanted"* classified sections of the community newspapers, college newspapers, or organizations' newsletters. At a minimum your ad should include hours needed, a brief description of duties, telephone number and time to call. You could also mention preferences such as non-smoker or male/female, and wage offered.

Examples:

1) Grocery shopping, light housekeeping. 6 hrs. every Friday. Non-smoker. 272-9310 after 5 p.m.

2) Female needed part-time. Personal care, household chores. Flexible hours. 530-1213 between 9 a.m. & noon.

Interviewing

You do not need to interview every person who calls in response to your ad or other contacts. When applicants call, you should describe the job in some detail as well as your expectations and the general wage range you are offering. You may want to ask if they have done this kind of work before or why they are interested in this job.

For those you feel are appropriate for the job, set a specific appointment time for an interview. It is recommended that you invite a family member or friend to be present for the interview. This can be very helpful both for moral support and in sorting out the information you obtain during the interview.

For the interview: have a sample contract ready for the applicant to read. Record name, address, and telephone number of applicant. Below are some suggested interview questions. **Make up your own list of questions which meet your particular need.**

Where have you worked before? What kinds of things did you do?

Tell me something about your hobbies, interests, family.

How do you feel about caring for an elderly or disabled person?

Have you ever provided care for a person similar to what this job requires?

Do you have any emotional or physical problems which might hinder you in the job?

How do you feel about cooking and eating what someone else wants?

How do you handle persons who are angry or violent?

Why are you choosing to do this kind of work?

What makes you uncomfortable or angry?

What is your attitude about smoking, drinking, or using drugs?

Is there anything in the job description which you would not do?

What commitment to staying on this job are you willing to make?

Please give me two work-related and one personal reference.

Review your check list (which follows) before ending the interview. If the applicant is obviously unsuited, be non-committal about future contact. Remind a suitable applicant that you will need to check references before making a decision. **Never hire someone without checking references!**

Take time after your interview to jot down your notes and impressions. This is an important decision and your own personal reaction is vital to a successful match. Discuss your impressions with a family member or friend.

Interview Check List

This check list is to be used during the interview of a prospective employee and completed immediately.

1. Was the person on time for the interview?

2. Did the applicant and I agree on the terms and conditions of the contract?

3. Do I need to modify my contract before employing this person? How?

4. Did I get at least **two** references that I can call to verify his/her ability to perform needed services?

5. Did I say when I would probably notify the applicant of his/her acceptance or non-acceptance?

6. Do I have the name and telephone number of the applicant?

7. Did I feel comfortable or at ease with the person?

8. Did I note any mannerisms that made me uncomfortable? (Dress, speech, behavior)

Questions to ask References

1. How long have you known the applicant? Dates? In what relationship?

2. What was his/her position?

3. Can you tell me more about his/her responsibilities?

4. How did the person get along with you and senior adults?

5. What were your impressions of him/her as a worker?

6. Did he/she show initiative, or wait to be told what to do?

7. Was the person reliable/dependable?

8. What were the applicant's strengths? Weaknesses?

9. Did you find him/her trustworthy and honest?

10. Were you aware of any problems with drugs or alcohol?

11. Is he/she still working for you? If not, would you re-hire?

Describe the job situation and ask reference if the applicant would be a good match for the position.

Hiring

Once an applicant is offered the job and accepts, the contract should be signed before the worker starts. Each party should have a copy of the signed contract.

Financial and Legal Considerations

When you become an employer there are a number of obligations that belong to you. If you pay $50.00 or more per quarter of the year to an employee you are required by law to withhold for social security benefits and make quarterly payments to the IRS. (EXCEPTION: If the person you are hiring reports to the IRS as self-employed and pays his/her own social security.)

Also be aware that accidents can happen to your employee and you need to have insurance coverage for such incidents.

Below is a check list covering a number of specifics:

1. Discuss with your homeowner insurance agent about your liability coverage as it applies to someone in your employment.
2. You have drawn up a contract agreement detailing rate of pay, days and hours of employment. Also clarify any fringe benefits – for example, bus fare.
3. **Get IRS forms and publications about social security withholding requirements.** Call IRS 442-5000; ask for Form 942.
4. Set up a form for record of payments to employee. (see below)
5. When you file your own 1040 tax return, determine if payments to your employee qualify as a medical deduction on your return.
6. Be aware of possible legal and financial pitfalls of paying in cash instead of by check. Use receipt forms or other proof of payments to worker. (Generic receipt books are available where stationery supplies are sold.)
7. Keep a record of any serious problems you have with your worker, in case of dispute later.

Name of Worker	Dates of work covered	Date of Payment	Amount Paid	Deductions	Check No.
R. S. Tee	11/3 - 11/15	11/17/84	Gross $50.00 Net 46.75	$3.23 S.S.	2635

KEEPING YOUR WORKER

Communication between employer and employee is important. People appreciate being told when doing a good job. It is also helpful to tell people about irritating factors. The small annoyances often cause problems when not discussed. A good work environment will generally bring the best performance from an employee. Open communication is a necessary component in providing a good work environment.

The following "tips" (suggestions/recommendations) should be considered in keeping communication open:

1. Give praise for a job well done. People like to be appreciated.
2. Be fair and kind.
3. Respect your employee's privacy.
4. Be sincere. Don't say something you don't mean – it might backfire later.
5. Be sure your employee understands what you expect. Give clear directions.
6. When a worker does not know how to do a task requested, either you or a family member or a friend should demonstrate what is desired. Have your worker demonstrate back to your satisfaction.
7. Don't let small irritations build up until an angry confrontation occurs.
8. Permit ample time for discussion to resolve problems.
9. Treat your employee as you would like to be treated.

GIVING PRAISE – Factors to consider:

Describe the situation or event which you like and include your feeling.

Examples: *"Thank you for putting non-skid strips in the bath tub. I feel so much safer."* (Often thank you is all one needs to say.)

"I really appreciate the extra care you take in cleaning under the sofa, bed, and around the sink. Having a clean home is wonderful."

"Thank you very much for making the effort to be here on time."

"You certainly know how to give a nice manicure."

Continued on next page

GIVING CRITICISM – Factors to consider:

1. Describe the situation or event which you did not like.
   Include your feelings.
2. Make a suggestion that would improve the situation next time.
3. Many times it is better to give praise first and then follow with criticism.

Examples: (Poor and Better)

Poor – "It is not necessary to use ten rags to clean the kitchen floor and cupboards! Even though you wash the rags out, it annoys me to find the rags pasted on all counters – it looks so messy."

Better – "You did a good job cleaning the kitchen floor and cupboards. But I'd like you to use fewer rags and hang them on the lines in the furnace room to dry after you've washed them out."

USE CRITICISM AS A TOOL TO SHARE INFORMATION THAT WILL HELP DO THE JOB WELL

1. Give criticism as soon as possible after the problem occurs.
2. Criticize only one incident at a time.
3. Keep criticism brief and to the point.
4. Criticize actions, not the person. (For example, "You are a terrible cook" criticizes the person; better to say "You cooked my eggs too long – I prefer softer eggs" which criticizes the action and suggests improvement.)
5. Remember to forgive and forget.

I Need Help in My Home